A Research Proposal

on

JUXTAPOSITION OF FIGURATIVE AND ABSTRACT: A STUDY OF DYNAMICS OF HIMMAT SHAH'S ART

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1. Introduction

Modern Indian art is a kind of resistance to the Western artistic intelligentsia. An intricate analysis of this art pattern reveals its prime characteristics - the amalgamation of Indian thought process with western techniques. The Modern Indian art differs from its ancient counterpart in more than one respect. Basically it treats art objects with the balanced ideal of real and surreal (Mago, Pran Nath, 2011).

The 18th and 19th century witnessed the emergence of Indian art in the domain of the Western capitalistic art which was in a large way a counter reaction, paving way for the Bengal School of Art. The aim and aspiration of the Bengal School of Art movement was to counter the prevalent western trends and ideologies as also to glorify the rich tradition and heritage of Indian art. The movement was initiated by E. B. Havel and Abanindranath Tagore and its other important profounder were Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivediata, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Percy Brown.

Art historian Mamta Chaturvedi (2010) sites, "This initial spurt was followed by the pioneering work of Rabindranath Tagore who incorporated experimentation in such a way as to elevate the Indian nationalist art movement to a world vision level altogether. Tagore, a born innovator and an iconoclast, believed that an artist should not only be aware of tradition and try to assimilate its nuances in his unconscious self but also practice his art freely to unearth new forms and meanings. Tagore differed again from the mundane mass of art practitioners of his day in that he was very much against the nomenclature and labeling system which was prevalent at his time. Tagore's inspiration led to newer horizons being touched and in 1940's the Calcutta Group and the Progressive Artists of Bombay Group deconstructed the style of the Bengal School and created an original style by assimilating ideals of the contemporary art movements of West with that of the peripheral Indian folk art. It was highly felt to reject the shadows of stalwarts of the Bengal school like Abanindranath, Nandlal Bose, Asit K. Haldar and to create an individualistic style using one's own specific notions of tradition, style and belief.

Welcome as this was for the development of an auto telic Indian art-form, the artists of these movements somehow lacked the stamina and energy required for sustained work and fails to find any worthwhile group sustaining its impact for any considerable period. Some

noteworthy organizations of the period are: The Young Turks, The Bombay Progressive Artist Group, The Calcutta Group, The Delhi Shilpi Chakra and The Group 1890. These groups were greatly inspired by Western innovative concepts like Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism and Surrealism. It also responded to the famine of Bengal which led to the assimilation of the Marxist ideology in the works of its profounder. Art elsewhere in the country followed suit. Influence by the exhibition of the Calcutta Group, artists in Bombay like F. N. Sauza, S. H. Raza, K. H. Ara, M. F. Hussain, Sadanand Bakre and H. A. Gade embraced a similar ideology which led to the establishment of the Bombay Progressive Artist Group. The Avant-guard art movement of these three groups in turn helped other Indian artists to dream in their own way and establish their own groups (चतुर्वेदी ममता, 2010).

"After independence, the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, was established on the 5th of August 1954 to the needs of a widening art-horizon. But it become failed to establish any new art-movement. Dismayed with this uninspiring artistic and cultural scenario, many great artists migrated from India and settled in abroad. Regionalism, parochialism and lack of scope for development became key factors of post independence Indian art. It was in this depressing scenario that a new movement called the ***Group 1890*** established by J. Swaminathan led to incorporation of uniqueness and unfathomable zeal in the post independence Indian art. Members like Jeram Patel, Raghav Kaneria, Himmat Shah, Rajesh Mehra, Ambadas, Gulam Mohammad Sheikh, Jyoti Bhatt and others exhibited their skill, capacity and mettle in their highly individualistic and variegated works.

"At that times the basic nature of the Indian art", writes Sandhya Bordewekar (2011) "was not very different from that of the European art. It also followed the market and was governed by the age old capitalist concept of supply and demand. There was too much emphasis on the mastery of the individual artist and little scope for any mass movement which made it almost impossible for any individual group to flourish. The notable feature of post independence art, as a result, was that while all the groups and their activities are short-lived, the members of the groups nonetheless become famous and rich due to their individual artistry. The '*Group 1890'* had its first exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademy, New Delhi, in 1963 which unfortunately also happened to be its last. But the exhibition had a promissory note underlying its outer failure: it succeeded to project some talented young artist who later

came to prominence and have been dominating the Indian art scenario ever since. Himmat shah was one such talented young hand who subtly and skillfully infused different classical and folk media with several distinctive forms. The sensible diffusion of the Great and the Little traditions in Himmat Shah's works ultimately opened the way for an aesthetically novel, and personal tradition of the individual himself."

Kapoor Geeta (2000) writes that "Himmat Shah comes from a Jain family that had moved from Kathiawar to Ahmadabad district. His grandfather was a *nagar seth* in the village of Lothal, the site of the major archeological excavation. In fact the site virtually overlapped with their lands. The family traded in grain and cotton; they also had land, cattle, and horses. By the time Himmat grew up the family prosperity had declined, his father who practiced Ayuevedic Medicine along with a much dwindled trade could not hold down Himmat's adolescent rebellion against domestic feuds. Himmat was in and out of school – once he ran away from home and hang out in an ashram in Girnar – but he had a spell of enlighten education in Ahmadabad , where his drawing was noticed, and he returned to the city to do a diploma in art teaching. He finally made his way to the Fine Arts Faculty of Baroda where he spent six years (1955 – 61) and became something a young star, soon after Baroda he come to live in Delhi.

"This was in July 1962. He stayed with Ambadas, he was welcomed by J. Swaminathan, he took up his earlier friendship with a kindred spirit, Jeram Patel and soon become a core member of the Group 1890. In the exhibition of group 1890 in 1963, he showed signed and burnt paper collages, works complementing the tarred, burnt, torn and nailed reliefs by Jeram Patel, the most innovative and intrepid of all these artists. In a career that ran paralled to Jeram's for a time, Himmat had a drawing show in Delhi in 1964 where the work was mostly figurative and erotic and just escaped being prescribed. George Butcher, in his pioneering UK exhibition of new Indian art in the mid 60s, showed Himmat's large drawing, Man's Fate. Fiercely erotic, full of copulating (fornicating) figures, Man's Fate created censorship problem in England and had to be salvaged on the ground that Himmat came from a tradition that gives spiritual status to the erotic! He went to Paris in 1966 on a scholarship and returned in October 1967 via London. In London he stayed with Raghav Kaneria , who had won high acclaim on the English sculptor scene. Himmat shows a huge

amount of art during this European sojourn and, besides conforming his admiration for like Picasso, Miro, Brancusi, Giacometti, he focused on a pertinent set of artists – Fotana (Himmat wanted to work with him), Burri, Tapies, Saulages – artist he knew from reproductions in Baroda and who suited his own already distinct sensibility – then later, Carl Andre who he met in India in 1971 at the 2nd Indian Triennial.

"On his return to India he took two years to work on a major relief-mural in brick and cement in a Modernist building of his architect friend, Hasmukh Patel: the Saint Xavier's school in Ahmadabad. For one of the three walls (18' x 20') he prepared 40 moulds from which he cast in cement relief. Devising in own methods of work, he also positioned himself in the contemporary sculpture field on the cusp of late modernist formalism. Himmat thus come to stand apart in Indian art not only vis-à-vis his sculptor colleagues, but also the older painter – turned – muralists like K.G. Subramaniyam, Satish Gujral and M.F. Hussain who continued to rely in the pictorial in their mid-60s terracotta and mosaic tile murals. Himmat went right on ahead to handle the sculptural vocabulary of geometrical abstraction on a monumental scale and, then, when he returned to 'painting' he made densely tactile relief using plaster, tar, cloth, enamel paint, silver foil, what-not reliefs that were 'walls' (like village walls that he had joined hands to plaster and decorate as a child / and like materially replete modernist walls of contemporary European painters he had begun to admire in the 1960s). From 1970 he was again living in Delhi for a while with J. Swaminathan. In the mid – 1970s he started to do sculpture in direct plaster which he showed first in 1979. These long interludes mark the time he took to evolve his own techniques and to also let the sculpture become itself – some of the plaster heads were immersed in linseed oil till they hardened into stone and then covered with silver-leaf to make them into ageless deities.

Thus Himmat confirmed the indigenes / modernist aesthetic favoured in India at the time, an aesthetic against time and history propagated by J. Swaminathan since the inception of the Group 1890. From the mid -1980s Himmat's work took on the look it bears until today – an array of heads and object-forms in plaster, ceramic and terracotta , sometimes enveloped with silver and gold-leaf that gives them the aspect of icons, shrines and votive object. But they suggest the vulnerable and even incidental nature of the object world and their informal perfection itself has a throwaway quality that denies the more deadening aspect of an

ideology of timelessness. In his work J.Swaminathan too favored the informal; Himmat's exquisite icons are endowed with the artist's sustained love of the material process (Kapoor Geeta 2000).

"Uniquely, he is able to make things sacred by simply cherishing them in his hands long enough, making even brick-a-brace part of the signifying chain that reconfigures the world as a playground of everyday desires…"

Even though Indian artists of 1960's, 70's and 80's were concerned about their Indian identity, ethos of Indian culture on the one side, on the other they have been greatly influenced by the European masters of early 20th century. This aspect could be seen in the works of Shah's contemporaries. My approach to understand Shah in depth is to go through the works of Pradosh Das Gupta, Mahendra Pandya, Somanath Hore and Raghav Kaneria as well as the western masters such as Henry Moore, Brancusi and Giacometti.

2. Review of literature

Pandey, Alka (2008) said in an interesting twist of fate, Himmat Shah was born in 1933in Lothal, one of the richest artifacts yielding sites of the Harappan civilization. Over the time, his work has grown to include diverse aspects of materiality. Shah also draws on a complex body of personal experience or, to quote from the catalogue of one of his exhibitions, "the childhood memory of horse borne dacoits who shot and crippled my father, the disintegrating jain household, running away from home into the Gir forests, living frugally in the Thar desert, homelessness in my urban life in Baroda and new Delhi, and my Garhi Studio, where I lived and worked for more than twenty years." Shah demonstrates an exceptional ability to see possibilities in unusual forms, and is immensely ironic in his own representations of the world as he sees it. He has received rave reviews for his rendering of the inputs he gathers from the complex and multi-layered visual field that human beings are surrounded by.

So it is necessary to see the development of art works of the eminent painter–sculpture Himmat Shah with some historical sense. Having initiated his journey as early as the mid of 20th century, now he is very much alive on the contemporary art scene and he has developed a diverse type of methodology and philosophy in his creation. The zigzag ways of

creation and his paradoxically bohemian as well as hermit-like figure attracts art-historians and critics alike to unravel the Gordian-Knot of the quintessence of his creation. In the 60's when he was attached with J. Swaminathan, he received more attention in contemporary art scenario.

Sinha, Gayatri (2007) said about that Himmat leading experiments are not restricted to scale; they also permeate his understanding of historical time and space. If Himmat engage the remnants of the past with the palpable present, he also encourages and coaxes out other narratives from the detritus of the earth surface. She again writes that his constructions of head, ancient presence are suggested, like atavistic shadows. More accurately, Himmat arrives at what Nilima Sheikh describes as "the projective voluptuousness of the image." Here, as the artist perceives it, the head, the phallus and the pillar all the same; the sculpture gains its vitality not in its definition, but in the process of arriving at a form. These works appear to re-echo the passage of civilizations, recalling early migrations between Africa and India to ancient seaports like Lothal, perhaps.

Shukla, Prayag (1999) has written the concern that the art of Himmat Shah does not proceed from any given notion of space and time. Here is a kind of excavation of an archaeologist, here is a feeling of celestial movement, and here is grapping against inhuman constraints. A striven for life and human dignity. A yearning for freedom, here is the courage of a diver and his findings "a constant creative search".

So the search of Shah is to find out the source of inspiration, tools and techniques via different mediums and method. He narrates his path of work with the help of content experimentation.

Khanna, Krishen (2007) said that vision is a small word used indiscriminately now days. At its lowest it is some form of egocentricism. At its broadest it is the percolation of the whole culture through the artist who acts as a receptacle. There is a powerful affinity between the tribal icons which have held communities together in our country for centuries. You grow up amongst them and these powerful images have persisted in your memory and now appear in the guise of your sculpture. An eminent contemporary art critic Geeta Kapoor has focused the metaphor of Himmat Shah Works. She says that "Modernist aesthetics has produced

many *awatars* of the early twentieth century idea of 'significant forms.' The ideas flourished on account of the ideological claim of universality by the moderns; on account of the more conductive claim for a universal language of forms to which artists happily subscribe. What is privileged in the modernist vision is a transformation of material into form via a process of metaphorical condensation. Therefore the insistence on the materiality of the transformational process itself rather than on the consequent (cultural) meaning."

Shekh, Nilima (2013) says his sculpture foregrounds the question of rural visual culture coalescing, or being brought to coalesce, with the modern urban preoccupations of design and art.

Chishti, Anees (1966) has written in the catalogue of Shah that this innovator has done his homework exceedingly well in various directions. He is an immaculate draughtsman and his drawing composition is perfect to the core. His lines speak and at times shake the onlooker out of the trivialities of worldly passions and emotions. Where, then, is room for "eroticism "or easy escape from creativity? One has to be absolutely pure to go through Himmat's meanderings. He does not live a life of contrived situation: his inspiration comes naturally from his inner self.

Bharadwaj, Vinod (2009) has written about him in his valuable book 'Kala Kosh', which has been published by the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. Acknowledging Himmat Shah *as an 'outsider'*, Bharadwaj points out the mastery of Shah's art which enthralls even stalwarts like J. Swaminathan. Bharadwaj also attests to the unrivalled popularity of Himmat Shah in mid 1960's which compelled the then famous Hindi magazine *Dinman Saptahik* to project the artist twice as in its cover story. Bharadwaj also informs us about the influence of Himmat's works on several leading poets who have been composing their poems since 1960's.

Since 90's when India entered into the age of globalization with its open economic policy, commoditization has became the byword of growing capitalist Indian society which had no time for a real artist like Himmat Shah. With his never yielding attitude, Shah also has confronted the commoditization in his characteristic way refusing to become part and partial of the market economy. The question that arises in this regard is whether it is possible for a

market to fully support of a creator. Or has it only one concern– to sell out the works and earn profit. Today it is a crying need to answer this very important query for the revival of the contemporary art scenario.

Kazmi, Nuzhat (2004) an eminent art historian explores the nature of Himmat Shah's works in this context. In her view Shah's portrays his sincerity towards art and not to the raters of monastery achievement. Since 1990's Shah has deliberately chosen clay and plaster as the medium of his creation. Here again, the notable point is that these two media have never been gripped by capitalist mercantile policy. According to Dr. Kajmi, the nucleus of Shahs artistry is not his exoteric, but his unique style to decipher the maiden beauty from a common day to day object. By choosing primitive art as his weapon to express thought, he does not confine his art to some specific genre or period; rather it imbibes the quality of post modern pastiche.

It is worth noting that Himmat Shah often quotes the words of Franz Kafka regarding his creation: "An art flies around the truth but with the determination not to get burnt by it. Its skill consists of finding a place in the void where the ray of life focuses most powerfully without knowing beforehand the location of the light source itself".

Shah's sculptures, especially in terracotta and bronze tend to explore materiality as well as texture. They also consider the various ways of presenting the life and realities of it by internalizing the consumerist society's built-in obsolescence. His gilded objects made in clay carry on them the traces of paintings and are akin to unreadable hieroglyphs deftly gouged into his series of metal heads. Alluding to age and decay, these self-mocking elements add a touch of drama to the work.

In an interview with Ved Prakash Bharadwaj, Himmat Shah expresses his own view regarding his inclination towards different unique and unused forms/mediums. He says that his use of clay as a medium sometimes astonishes himself and if the new form of clay enchants his artistic mind, within no time he adopts that form and makes it his signature style. He also records his distaste of abstract art and affirms that the aesthetics of art is his guiding force. Not only this, he even accepts that for him aesthetics is the ultimate purpose of art and not the form or content. While expressing his views regarding his unconventional

medium, clay, he accepts that the quality of clay enables him to transform it in every possible shape he wants and also opens up the enormous opportunities for experimentation.

Singh, Shanta Serbjeet (1982) has written that Himmat Shah believe that the artist is an enigma, a person whose work is only successful if it is the product of total "Samadhi", complete concentration. The artist is a Brahmaa unto himself. And like Brahhama, his purpose is to search for new and yet newer forms of creation.

Karode, Robina (1998) has written that Shah continuous to live in the same state of uncertainty that has marked his life's journey up until now. But there is a method of to his seeming 'madness' he deliberately goes into complete isolation confined within his studio for days without the acquaintance of a mind other then his own. Floating in timelessness, his little fragile world can easily be disrupted by an outsider's intrusion. Living within this subjective mood , he did driven to mould his vision into his work. She again writes that Shah said "I like my solitude, sugarless tea and daydreams," says Shah's casually, finishing a smile but I realize that it is extermly important to understand the working of Himmat's mind, which reveals his attitude to both his life and his art. He makes strong demands himself. There is a need of constant self – examination. He is often preoccupied, as if listening to his inner voice. A quietness that distances him from the world.

Mahendru, Hitti (1994) an art critic has written essays on Himmat Shah, mentions his inclination towards clay. Quoting the artist she says that the last ten years Shah has been trying to establish clay, which has a history of three thousand years as a creative medium. Shah says, 'I also want to create a demarcation line– if a marble man says this cannot be done in marble, but only in terracotta, then only will I be able to claim that terracotta is my medium. I will continue to struggle in this life, and in my next, and also if need be in the next, to perfect my art, till I am born a true artist, as was Picasso'.

In 1860, John Ruskin wrote that 'the characteristic of a great school of artist is that it introduces in the conception of its subject as much beauty as possible, consistently with truth. Truth and beauty are entirely distinct, through often related. For although truth and beauty are independent of each other, it does not follow that we are at liberty to pursue whichever we please. They are indeed inseparable, but it is wrong to separate them; they are to be

sought together in order of their worthiness, that is to say, truth first and beauty afterwards'. By stating this Ruskin has truly laid the first criterion for the modern art of our times.

Each work of Himmat's is an individual entity, created out of a new method with new techniques and having its own demands. Surrealism is a very adaptable name and can be used to describe a great variety of works, from objective to pure fantasy. Himmat's work is both figurative and abstract at the same time, and so cannot be put into any category, which is just the way Himmat want it to be. His works are thought's distinctions, free from any control of reason, and independent of any moral or aesthetic preoccupation. The aesthetics of these works goes beyond the concept of the 'beautiful' and the 'ugly' for the distorted faces often radiate warmth and humanity, because they have their own strength and enchantment. They are for all time. Himmat says:

> I observe nature in its different forms and in its different expressions, and am lost in wonder and beauty. Have you noticed that when a bird flies and spreads its wings as it picks up speed, it grows in size? And a small bird becomes big. As the bird spreads its wings, and glides tilted as various angels, hidden feathers and hues unknown are exposed, as if the bird had changed its cloth. I have watched it, and marveled at the beauty of its changing form, power and grace. And the concept of different angels I have applied to the kiln, and angled its fires such that they have produced new and mysterious colours which I myself never imagined. The human being is an enigma, and what he creates should also be an enigma. Mystery should be everywhere– like the bird that slowly spreads its wings, revealing hidden colours as it does so– especially so in art-forms. A piece of art is created because you allow it to happen, it cannot be forced– "I" am not creating, it is my hands that are creating, for when they have clay beneath them, "I" am lost. Next day, when I look at the creations, I wonder whether it was really I that had done it, for I had been totally lost as my hands had been shaping the clay. This state of creation I consider the best form of expression or *abhiwayakti*, arising out of the deepest devotion or *sadhana.* (68)

Nature is a great master and eternal source of the beautiful, both in the micro and macrocosm, and one doesn't cease to wonder at the wealth of the chiseled and harmoniously developed forms and at the symmetrical precession. But all the marvels are not visible at the surface, for known physical and chemical laws work underground to create luminous and transparent concentrations from black matter, which are in no way inferior to the beauties that adorn her surface. It is undoubtedly the fires underground that transform, and so too an artist need to burn with the flame of emotion. Sometimes nature arouses in men an emotion largely negative, rather than positive, when she appears to him terrible rather than beautiful. Crashing thunder would frighten not a poet or an artist, for like the antiparticle, it would create a beautiful balance in the observations. To quote Gorky, the poor and simple people of Rajasthan have their beliefs, and flag-topped temples are to be found scattered in the desert giving solace to the nomads. In yet another series, Himmat has placed a temple or a flag on a broken *thali*, a mud-baked plate used to hold food, thereby depicting the dependence of these rural poor on the gods to keep the plate filled. And so he has captured and displayed, the whole life pattern of the nomads by means of the pick (the breadwinner), the utensils (which are filled by the efforts of the pick), and the flag (for god allows them to earn and live).

As much as Himmat works with the metaphorical, he introduces, through the process of his work, fragments of civilization, the trace of the human hand, cycles of possession and dispossession of objects meant for use and pleasure. It is therefore worth traversing from the metaphor to metonymy and the aesthetics of the displaced part. Though Himmat's exhibited work looks like a field of retrieved fragments from the site of an excavation, it is his studio that is a manufacturing den for reliquary objects. It is a veritable treasure of the tomb of Tutankhamen where real objects, made into casts or shells or miniature souvenirs, stand prolix as friendly ghosts. His stacked studio can be seen to hold an inventory of trophies for a hard but well-lived life; a classic case of configuring parts to form an exclusive whole. It may be worth considering whether there is not something about Himmat's work that de-constructs civilization's responsibility to return to the dug-out site, to the mound of the dead…

In the above quoted literature reviews, which has been taken from various exhibition catalogues, magazines, newspaper clippings, biographies and websites of art galleries and auction houses written by writers and art critics of distinction focus on material explorations -

handling of materials such as clay and bronze, collages and assemblages, drawings, paintings and etchings, and murals in cement – techniques and his approach to art as a whole. Some of them have disclosed his psychological and personality traits in connection with his body of works created over the years. Critics like Shukla and Pandey have dug his childhood rural experiences and his connection with the village Lothal from where we have excavated the terracotta figurines and bricks from one of the earliest civilizations. One of India's celebrated artists, Krishen Khanna has noticed and appreciated his directness in connecting himself with the rural folk and the sculptural forms of the tribal folk of the Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Shah is a formalist and an existentialist. His body of works does reflect notions of time. While interacting and interviewing him, I have noticed that he is a perfectionist and a self-conditioned idealist. Since there is no research done and books written extensively on his life and works, this thesis would explore and expose his life and works which has been done during his peak hours of his career. A study of his works will be done in comparison to his immediate Indian contemporaries and with the western masters. Since he spent his decisive period between learning and practices in Paris it is important to bring in the Existential theories to bring in connection with his work.

The study would include the artists such as Pradosh Das Gupta, who was the leader of Calcutta Group of artists. Pradosh was critical about the pale and lifeless works of the Bengal School and its followers. In and around 1940s he learnt that that there should be a revolutionary change in artistic approach. So, he gathered a group of like-minded artists from Calcutta, held an important landmark show in Bombay by 1943 which inspired a set of young artists in their 20s namely Souza, Raza, Ara and Husain. It is also notable that the Calcutta Group artists had strongly reacted against Bengal Famine and its causes with their art. Famine also made an enduring impact over artists like Somanath Hore.

Elsewhere, in the western part of India – in Bombay and Baroda – artists, contemporary to Shah were V S Gaitonde, Raghav Kaneria, and Mahendra Pandya approached art in a rather formalist manner. Gaitonde, the first of the abstract painters of India avoided any visible, readable content in his work where as Kaneria and Pandya went on to simplify the human forms in the lines of the British sculptors like Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth.

In the words of Eleanor Dodge Barton, an eminent American scholar and art historian:

> "One dominant figure in the world of sculpture, Henry Moore (1898-1986), used traditional materials (wood, bronze, and stone) in exploring traditional problems of sculpture such as the seated figure and the reclining figure. He believed that the space shapes created by a sculpture are as important to its design as the solid forms, and he often put holes or openings in his sculptures. Moore also contrasted light and dark by curving his bronze figures inward and outward. Form and space, reality, emotion, and perfect beauty are the interests of artists in all centuries. The 20th century only gave them new shape. The 20th century was an age of experimentation with new ideas, new styles, and new materials. Studies of the human figure gave way to new subjects: dreams, ideas, emotions, and studies of form and space. Plastic, chromium, and welded steel were used, as well as boxes, broken automobile parts, and pieces of old furniture. (Eleanor Dodge Barton www.scholastic.com)

Writing on Moore, Jane Eckett in his thesis *Hol(e)y Statues: Some Reflections on Holes, Emptiness and Longing in the Work of Two Australin émigré Sculptors of the Fifties'* writes as follows:

> "For Moore, the special significance of the hole is that it "connects one side to the other", thereby allowing the viewer to apprehend the three-dimensionality of the object, which distinguishes it from painting or other two-dimensional art forms. Moore's "revelation" makes better sense when considered alongside an earlier passage from the same essay, in which he describes the means by which a sculptor could understand three-dimensional form. He [the sculptor] gets the solid shape, as it were, inside his head – he thinks of it, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely enclosed in the hollow of his hand. He mentally visualizes a complex form from all round itself; he knows while he looks at one side what the other side is like; he identifies himself with its centre of gravity, its mass, its weight; he realizes its volume, as the space that the shape displaces in the air. The piercing of form – the creation of holes – was, for Moore, the most immediate way of emphasizing the

three-dimensional nature of the form, allowing both the artist and viewer to comprehend the 'thing-ness' of the sculpture, over and above the immediate view offered by any one standpoint. However, the incorporation of holes was not just a formal device for Moore. Far from regarding form as an end in itself, Moore was "very much aware that associational, psychological forces play a large part in sculpture. The meaning and significance of form itself probably depends on the countless associations of man's history."9 Rather than view holes as being merely the result of purely formal experimentation, it seems plausible, in light of Moore's words, to ascribe a symbolic meaning to these spaces of absence.

"Formalism, or the appreciation of art in such terms as volume, mass, colour and texture, was a means of liberating art from the propaganda machines of the state. Ironically, such rational, scientific objectivity effectively denatured modernism's history. Symbolism was deemed suspect, despite its continued usage by vast numbers of artists, including Moore. To write about holes in sculpture as possessing symbolic significance is therefore a delicate task."

Back in India the eminent artist and art historian K G Subramanyan, observes and compares the works of Moore with that of ancient Mayan sculptures:

"One of the reason for this may be looked for in the fact that when this aesthetic found acceptance with Indian artists the realist sense in contemporary Europe had undergone radical change, through the impressionist and post impressionist phases and its artists, more widely aware of the world art spectrum in time and space, where realizing to themselves its contradictory specialties from within their position in the realistic aesthetic. To do this they learned out to study the various "transformations" nature underwent in art and to identify their formulations, grow various kind of eclecticism and sweeping of cultural traits. The relationship of area of Moore's work to Mayan sculptures, Picasso's to African art, Matisse to Persian painting, Klee's to Moorish arabesque and calligraphy is too well known to deserve special mention."

Since the English sculptor, Henry Moore's influence is significant over the developmental stages of modern Indian art between the 1940s and 70s; Himmat Shah being active participant of the time could not totally segregate himself from Moore and his formalist approach.

3. Objective

1. To analyze the aesthetic sensibility of Himmat Shah's art and development of his artistic vision in Indian contemporary art's context.
2. To search the trends of modernity, materiality, individuality, existentialism and nationality in Himmat Shah's art works during 1970's to 1980's.
3. To see the development of methodology and medium expansion in Himmat Shah's art.
4. To see the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western tradition in Himmat Shah's art and comparative study with Pradosh Das Gupta, Vasudeo S. Gaitonde, Somenath Hore, Mahendra Pandya and Raghav Kaneria.
5. To see and analyse the works of Shah among the western masters such as Henry Moore, Brancusi and Giacometti who had been a great influence over Indian art during 1960's through 80's.

4. Hypothesis

By studying Shah, it is understood that he lived and worked in a (1970s and 80s) most serious and crucial moments of social and political life of India. The political ambitions of the then ruling party jeopardized the freedom of speech which created havoc in the social circle. The quake in the so called socialist economy did not support people getting jobs and did not help them find their own means of living. The political turmoil was in its high like emergency, death of Indira Gandhi and the day-light killings of Sikhs in Delhi and so on.

But it is obvious that this *turmoil* did not affect many of our artists who were working in Delhi. The artists never come up with their voice against the atrocities of the day. Shah being one of them, a formalist in his approach it seems he never had any political and social concerns to express. Though we could critically reject him and his works questioning his

social and political stand, it is also true that being an artist, even in this critical period he survived by overcoming all his financial and emotional aspects by being focusing on his work and work alone.

Himmat has always been a genius. He came on the earth only for art. When he was about 10 years old he had an inkling of what he could do with his hands. His family not agreeing with him, he finally left his home. He never returned and burnt his whole life in the flame of his creative genius. Now he lives not only for himself but for the whole world. Not a popular artist but one very vital for to his time and society as well as the contemporary art scenario.

5. Scope of the study

The art of Himmat Shah is complex and multi-dimensional. He drew his source and inspiration from a large number of people, periods, mediums and ideologies. These must have been assimilated and metamorphosed in the melting-pot of the genius of Shah to become individual pieces of art. This study is aimed to ascertain and reveal the steps of Shah's creation. The span of Shah's creativity is very long. It stretches from the 1960's to 1980's. As such it is possible to see the different trends of contemporary Art practice in his art. It may also help a discerning critic to understand the achievements of the 'Group 1890' and the contribution of artist-thinker J. Swaminathan in the development of that group. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the figurative and the abstract in the art of Himmat Shah may be pinpointed and underlined as the quintessence of his artistic processes. Kapoor,Geeta (2000) says:

> It must be ever borne in the mind that Shah always works with the metaphorical: he introduces, through the process of his work, fragments of civilization, the trace of the human hand, and cycles of possession and dispossession of objects meant for utility and pleasure. It would therefore be worthwhile, as one studies his methods and techniques, while taking a trip from the metaphorical to metonymy and the aesthetics of displaced part. (62)

In fact Shah's journey starts from a village, and passes through different urban and metro-centers, had a stint or two abroad and then came back to Delhi. So, this shift from one place to other consolidates the different ideals of his journey. In his work we can always asses the metaphor of transformation of village into urban and then the metro. Shah has the ability to transform the low or mundane into high aesthetics of art. Studying the works of Himmat Shah is a study of growth of modern Indian art and its interactions with the contemporary trends of western art, particularly the Europe.

By the end of 1940s, in the aftermath of the World War II, from the independent India more and more intellectuals and artists started moving towards Europe for further and higher studies in their chosen fields. Most of them went on scholarships and fellowships. They chose to go to France since Paris its capital happened to be the most significant centre of art in the 19th and 20th centuries. The artists of that era and the isms they had created made an impact over the artists and art lovers around the world.

At this context, it is important to note that by 1950, the golden era of the Parisian art scene has lost its epicenter to New York. By then, most of the Europeans, particularly the German, French, Spanish, East European artists and intellectuals have migrated to America to save themselves from atrocities of Nazi movement, war, socio-cultural and economic reasons. That means, when the Indian artists arrived in Europe, the Parisian art scene was almost blank without those great masters of the 20th century art movements.

In late 1940's and 50's the artists of Progressive Group like F N Souza, S H Raza, Krishen Khanna and Akbar Padamsee; N S Bendre, K K Hebbar, Krishna Reddy, Pradosh Das Gupta, Ram Kumar, K S Kulkarni, V S Gaitonde and P T Reddy, **Raghav Kaneria** have got the opportunities to visit and study the works of masters as well as to do their post graduate and doctoral studies in art. That was a major shift in the post independent art scenario.

In 1966-67 Himmat Shah received an opportunity to study in Paris at Heyter's Atelier 17 which is supposed to be the epicenter of international Printmaking. He worked under the guidance of master printmakers such as Heyter and Krishna Reddy.

Before visiting Paris, Shah was concentrating on painting and collage as his medium of expression. In Atelier 17 he did printmaking - lithography and etching. Shah went

to Paris in the aftermath of the World War II, in the initial developmental stages of Europe from the shackles of war. Shah was experienced a post war city of Europe - a period of transition.

Back home Shah did not continue printmaking. Instead, he started working on murals and relief works in Ahmedabad. By this time, he, as an artist was looking for a proper and suitable medium to say what he wanted to say, to express what he wanted to express. He found himself in a situation of confusion and dabbled with all possible mediums to explore his inner priority.

Himmat Shah moved to Delhi, started working at the Lalit Kala Studios at Garhi Village. By then he has realized that only the 3D medium would bring him working satisfaction. He chose clay where he could feel and mould his forms. This stage is the most important phase of his artistic career. In clay he modeled the figures and faces in detail and reduced the details to abstraction, probably artists like Brancusi, Giacometti and theories of Existentialism must have inspired him to do so or think in that path. He is basically an introvert and there is a feeling of *lost* identity in his works which he must have imbibed from the post war Parisian artists. He is always with himself, in his own world thinking forms in detail and reducing them to abstract! He is emotional but sinks his emotions to formlessness. He worked solely with human forms thinking that only through human forms he could achieve his artistic purpose. Day by day and work by work his language became subtler and sensitive. His forms became simpler where his works to be viewed and to be touched to experience the tactile meanings - seeking an ultimate with minimum formal details.

Shah is a traditionalist and did stick to his ideas to purity of form and medium. He worked with clay and loved terracotta. He casted his works in bronze or in metal depending on the need of the particular form. He has also developed his own slip-casting technique while working with terracotta and ceramics.

1960's and 70's is the most crucial time of Indian contemporary art which was seeking an identity of its own in the international art scenario. Though there was a strong need for an Indian identity most of the artists were inspired by the western masters. Hence, the overall approach to art became universal, the content became wider and the visual language has

become experimental. But it is observed that by 80's a situation of stagnancy blocked Indian art. That was because the Indian artists who were following the path of 19th and early half of 20th century art movements of Europe could not think and achieve beyond. That has changed later in 1990's with the emerging new generation, economic globalization where information and communication technology reduced the world as a global village.

Shah being one of the stalwarts of this transitional period whose career span between 1960 and 1980, a period of dilemma and uncertainty, filled up a lacuna in the sculptural language of Indian art. Study of his works not only signifies the development of visual forms in the history of modern Indian art it also emphasizes the time and mindset of the people in general and the artist in particular.

6. Proposed methodology

Adams, Laurie Schneider 2009: A picture is worth a thousand of words. No amount of words can describe an image or an object exactly, weather it is a picture, a sculpture, or a work of architecture. This is because word constitutes one kind of language and imagery another, thereby creating a need for translation. When one of the most prominent nineteenth century art critics John Ruskin described painting, he approached a unique fusion of language and image by creating what has been called the "poetic equivalent of a painting." But even reading Ruskin does not eliminate the necessity of seeing what he describes, however convincingly he describes it.

At that level to see a work of art convincingly demand us to develop a poetic vision to understand a form of visual. It also demands an expertise to interpret images as a separate thing. So only research is the way where we can develop such kind of methodology to evaluate an art work sincerely. Because research is a systematic, objective, reproducible and deliberate attempt to answer meaningful questions pertaining to a field of study or about phenomenon or events in a given situation. It is also a necessary step for our society because it is directed towards the solution of a problem.

The nature of my research is basically qualitative. But some times quantitative method could be used to gather data during interviews and assessment of questionnaire. So, both qualitative and quantitative methods will have to be employed to gather the data and evaluate it. Part of this research I want to study Shah's journey as a human being and his

works as an artist. So, the case study of Himmat Shah's works will be done according to the requirements of the subject with a set methodology already prevailed in studying an individual and his works.

This study will concentrate over Shah's creations of 1970's and 80's. It's a peak time in his professional career. So the method of study will be of self report and observational survey. I am also planning to use co-relational and developmental study methodologies to understand contemporary Indian art practices especially during 1970's and 1980's. I will try to relate and analyse the Shah's creations with his immediate contemporaries such as Pradosh Das Gupta, Vasudeo Gaitonde, Somenath **Hore,** Mahendra Pandya and Raghav Kaneria. To see the developmental trends in visual art, their path of experimentation and the methodologies of material expansion, I will be capable to evaluate modern Indian art scenario. The study of western masters such as Henry Moore, Brancusi and Giacometti would help me to understand and read the co-relations and inspirations of western masters over Indian art scene.

Similarly the method of content analysis will be employed wherever possible. It will help me to evaluate the progression in Shah's creation. My priority also is to view his works through various angles which are as below:

a. Iconographical development in his works
b. Formulism in his style and methodology which he has adopted
c. His concerns over the society
d. Individualistic and existentialist approach of current trends
e. **Psychoanalysis of Freud and Roger Fry**
f. Theories **of Deconstruction**
g. Theories **of Modernism and Post Modernism**
h. **Semiotics of Structuralism and Post Structuralism**

While analyzing the works of Shah, it is prudent to assimilate his works with both the eastern and western methodologies. So the Indian theories of *Chitrasutra* and the *Shadanga* are equally useful. **To follow the principles of contemporary art will also be the guiding spirit behind the present effort of content analysis.**

I will be conducting interview schedules with art historians, critics, professionals and art collectors. They will provide me valuable data's to see Shah's works from different dimensions. By visiting libraries and art galleries I will be capable of gathering primary and secondary data's. I will also be visiting those places where Shah had been practicing his art such as M. S. University Baroda, Lalit Kala Studios at Garhi Village and his present Jaipur studio. I will visit Lalit Kala Akademy and National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi where his works have been available for the public to view and research.

I will be following the APA methods of writing research papers and thesis. I will cooperate with our honorable guide, teachers and university rules and regulation to get maximum support to successfully complete my proposed research. I will work in a manner that my research over Himmat Shah would be useful for the art professionals, researchers and students to understand modern art trends of 1960's to 1980's.

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